# 10                                              Bhatt'uddesaka Sutta

The Discourse on the Meal-steward • **A 4.20**/2:19
Theme: Freedom from the 4 biases

## 1 Introduction

The Bhatt'uddesaka Sutta lists 4 qualities that make a bad meal-steward,[1] and those of a good meal-steward (*bhatt'uddesaka*), that is, he is free from **bias** (*āgati*) of desire, of hate, of delusion, and of fear.

### 1.1 TEACHINGS—IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT

**1.1.1** KEY PHRASE. *Yathâbhataṁ nikkhitto evaṁ niraye*, "It would be for him just as if he had been taken and thrown into hell"—this is a difficult sentence. It is rendered following the commentarial gloss: "He will be cast into hell as if carried off and put there by the wardens of hell" (MA 2:32). The context's provisional tone—"as if" (*yathâbhataṁ*)—should be noted, along with the conditional "thus" (*evaṁ*). This is a clear hint that both these words work with the same force as *pariyāyena,* "in a provisional manner."[2]

**1.1.2**  In other words, we should not take this in a literal "hell-fire" theological sense—the Buddha is never known to have "cast" anyone down into hell or even cursed anyone.[3] It should be noted that **it is not the Buddha who wills such an action** (falling into hell or going to heaven), but the results of our own malicious karma brings upon us a hell-like suffering.[4]

### 1.2 TEACHINGS: THE PERSON-BASED AND THE TRUTH-BASED

**1.2.1**  The "behavioural"[5] tone of **the Sobhana Sutta** and many other similar suttas in the Aṅguttara — that the bad find themselves in *hell*, and the good in *heaven*—are addressed primarily to the Indian laity and audience who already have such beliefs, on account of popular lore.[6] Such ideas, common to the major religions of the Buddha's time, as far as early Buddhism is concerned, should be understood as a "person-based" (*puggalâdhiṭṭhāna*) teaching—the personification of mental states.[7]

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[1] The PTS tr (A:W, 1932) misunderstood the Pali—*chand'āgatiṁ gacchati, dos'āgatiṁ gacchati, moh'āgatiṁ gacchati, bhay'āgatiṁ gacchati*—and mistranslated this as "He goes to the no-bourn through desire, ill-will, delusion and fear"!

[2] See SD 3.9 (7.5.1), SD 50.25 (1.4) and *Pariyāya nippariyāya,* SD 68.2.

[3] Sadly, a long list of nefarious curses (some 6 pages long) is found in the Lotus Sutra (ch 3) and other Mahāyāna Sutras—attesting to their late unbuddhist polemical provenance. See also Reflection, **"The Buddha one and only,"** R389, 2015.

[4] See **Asi,bandhaka,putta Kula S** (S 42.9,11) n, SD 7.11. See also Ñāṇamoli, *The Lion's Roar: Two Discourses of the Buddha* (WH 390/391), rev Bhikkhu Bodhi, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1993 n17.

[5] "Behavioural" means based on a "behaviorist perspective," ie, "The psychological perspective primarily concerned with observable behavior that can be objectively recorded and with the relationships of observable behavior to environmental stimuli" (Gerrig & Zimbardo, *Psychology and Life*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2002), esp in terms of a "reward and punishment" (carrot-and-stick) process. This is merely a descriptive and comparative observation, not an endorsement of any psychological basis for the term usage.

[6] The major religions of Buddha's time significantly share a common mythology of heaven and hell. Many of these notions are rooted in the Vedas, and developed, eg, in Jainism and Buddhism.

[7] On these 2 ways of teaching (*desanā*)—the person-based (*puggalâdhiṭṭhāna*) and the truth-based (*dhammâdhiṭṭhāna*), see SD 36.1 (1.11.2); SD 47.20 (1.2.3).

**1.2.2**  Such a personified mythology is—or should be—the basis for a "truth-based" (*dhammadhiṭṭhāna*) or **concept-based** understanding of such myths. Technically, *both* the person-based and the truth-based teachings are based on concepts. However, while the personified ideas are "provisional" (*pariyāya*), expressing ultimate *true* reality on the level of conventional *virtual* reality, the "truth-based" concepts are "non-provisional" (*nippariyāya*), that is, refer directly to true reality.

**1.2.3**  We usually understand "**true reality**" to refer to our down-to-earth daily life, and take the experiences of a sophisticated computer-generated game or scenario as being that of "**virtual reality**." A normal person would clearly know the difference, even if he thoroughly enjoys the experiences of the digital virtual reality.

We can imagine the sufferings of hell as *virtual reality*—like a computer-generated setting. In fact, both are "mind-made" (*mano,maya*) states, as are our reactions to those experiences. However, a normal person is able to distinguish between the two, even while "playing" the game or experiencing such a scenario.

On the other hand, a deluded person—especially one with habitual bad karma—will react to such "games" and scenarios as being truly real.  In a significant sense, such a person is unhinged, at least for the duration of that deluded experience. Such a suffering state can last for as long as the person is deluded—and this can be a very long time, especially when he has little experience of true reality, or is unwilling or unable to see it.

**1.3 HELL AND HEAVEN**

**1.3.1**  Although it is easier to apply this twin approaches—the person-based and the truth-based teachings—to the notions of the hells and the other subhuman suffering states, it is more problematic when applied to the heavens and heavenly beings. They are often taken—perhaps wishfully—as being actual places and actual beings.[8]

**1.3.2**  Buddhism is, of course, not against the idea of such celestial beings as an early Buddhist imagination of what we today understand as alien species and their worlds in the remote quadrants of outer space. Many such alien beings are conceived in space fiction as more evolved and having greater powers than humans. Or, perhaps the writers of these fictions have based their ideas on religious (such as Buddhist) mythology.[9]

**1.4 TEACHINGS: THE IMPLICIT AND THE EXPLICIT**

**1.4.1**  Ultimately, all our views and understanding of the sutta narratives and statements about heaven and hell should be guided by the teachings of **the Neyy'attha Nīt'attha Sutta** (A 2.3.5+6). The essence of the teaching of the Sutta is that we should rightly differentiate these 2 kinds of suttas and teachings:

(1)  A sutta or teaching whose sense is drawn out (*nīt'attha*) (that is, an explicit teaching).
(2)  A sutta or teaching whose sense is to be drawn out (*neyy'attha*) (that s, an implicit teaching).[10]

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[8] See C Witanachchi, "Heaven and hell," *Ency of Buddhism*, Colombo: Govt of Sri Lanka, 1990, vol 5: 421-432.
[9] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fictional_extraterrestrials, esp Stargate alien races and Star Trek alien races.
[10] A 2.3.5+6/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

**1.4.2** Those suttas or teachings that tell stories, describe ritual acts, or talk of "beings," "gods," etc, <u>need</u> to have their meaning <u>drawn out</u> (*neyy'attha*), as they do not directly refer to true reality. They use the language of <u>conventional terms, metaphors and names</u>, especially in the form of a story or an imagery. Their meaning is *indirect* or *implicit*. They are <u>provisional</u> (*pariyāya*) teachings.

    Where and when teachings are given in terms of <u>ideas</u>—such as the 3 roots (greed, hate and delusion), or the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness)—they are said to have their meaning <u>already drawn out</u> (*nīt'attha*), that is, a *direct* or *explicit* sense. Such teachings point directly to true reality; hence, they are also said to be *absolute* or *ultimate* (*nippariyāya*).[11]

**1.4.3** Philosophically, we must also note that, in the *neyy'attha* or implicit scheme of things, it does not matter whether those beings, things or states exist or not—as far as we understand—but they rest on the fact that we conceive or perceive them in our minds. Conversely, in the *nīt'attha* or explicit scheme of things, we both analyse the true nature of such beings or ideas, and see them in relation to one another and to everything else—we see some common principle underlying all of them, namely, those of <u>the 3 universal characteristics</u> of impermanence, suffering and non-self.[12]

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# The Discourse on the Meal-steward
## A 4.20

    **1**    Bhikshus, when a meal-steward possesses 4 qualities, it would be for him just as if he had been taken and thrown into **hell**.[13] What are the four? **[19]**

    **2**  T HE 4 BIASES
| | |
|---|---|
| (1) One is <u>biased</u> on account of  desire. | *chand'āgatiṁ gacchati* |
| (2) One is *biased* on account of  hate. | *dos'āgatiṁ gacchati* |
| (3) One is *biased* on account of  delusion. | *moh'āgatiṁ gacchati* |
| (4) One is *biased* on account of  fear. | *bhay'āgatiṁ gacchati* |

    **3**  When, bhikshus, a meal-steward possesses 4 qualities, it would be for him just as if he had been taken and thrown into <u>hell</u>.

    **4**    Bhikshus, when a meal-steward possesses 4 qualities, it would be for him just as if he had been taken and thrown into heaven. What are the four?

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   [11] Technically, *pariyāyena* and *nippariyāyena,* respectively. See SD 33.2 (2.1); **Pariyāya nippariyāya**, SD 68.2.

   [12] On <u>the 3 universal characteristics</u>, see SD 1.2 (2); also **Dhamma,niyāma S** (A 3.134), SD 26.8.

   [13] *Yathâbhataṁ nikkhitto evaṁ niraye:* a well known stock (M 1:71; S 4:325; A 1:8, 105, 292, 297, 2:71, 83; It 12, 14, 26, etc). On *yathā + ābhata*, see PED: 549 (yathā'bhata). Its converse *yathâbhataṁ nikkhitt+ evaṁ* <u>sagge</u> is also very common. The 2 phrases often appear in the same sutta, mostly commonly found in the Aṅguttara, eg, **Kodha Peyyāla** (A 2.31-35/1:96); **Sāvajja S** (A 3.142/1:292); **Bhatt'uddesaka S** (A 4.20/2:19), SD 51.17(3.3); **Maccharinī S** (A 5.115/3:139 ×2); **Niraya S 1** (A 6.81/3:432); **Upasikā S** (A 10.203/5:287). See SD 47.3b (2.1) for 4 related suttas. On <u>hell</u>, see (3.5.2).

**5** FREEDOM FROM THE 4 BIASES
(1) One is <u>not</u> biased on account of  desire.          *na chand'āgatiṁ gacchati*
(2) One is *not* biased on account of  hate.           *na dos'āgatiṁ gacchati*
(3) One is *not* biased on account of  delusion.        *na moh'āgatiṁ gacchati*
(4) One is *not* biased on account of  fear.           *na bhay'āgatiṁ gacchati*

**6** Bhikshus, when a meal-steward possesses 4 qualities, it would be for him just as if he had been taken and thrown into <u>heaven</u>.

## Closing verses

**7** *Ye keci kāmesu asaññatā janā*[14]          Those people, unrestrained in sense-pleasures,
*adhammikā honti adhamma,gāravā*          unjust, disrespectful of the Dharma,
*chandā dosā mohā ca bhayā gāmino* [15]       going by desire, hate, delusion and fear,
*parisa-k,kasāvo*[16] *ca pan'esa vuccati*        are indeed called a stained assembly—
*evaṁ hi vuttaṁ samaṇena jānatā*          such is said by the recluse who knows.

**8** *Tasmā hi te sappurisā pasaṁsiyā*          Therefore, those true individuals, praiseworthy,
*dhamme ṭhitā ye na karonti pāpakaṁ*       firm in the Dharma, not doing bad
*na chanda,dosā na bhayā ca gāmino*[17]       on account of desire, hate[, delusion] or fear,
*parisāya maṇḍo ca pan'esa vuccati*         they are called the cream of assemblies—
*evaṁ hi vuttaṁ samaṇena jānatâti*         such is said by the recluse who knows.  **[20]**

— evaṁ —

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[14] Only Ce:T *asaññata ~.*

[15] Be *chandā dosā mohā ca bhayā gāmino;* Ce Ee Ke Se *chandā ca dosā ca bhayā ca gāmino.*

[16] Be:King *parisa,kaṭo;* Ce Ee Ke *parisa-k,kasāvo;* Be Se *parisakasaṭo.*

[17] Be *na chandā na dosā na mohā na bhayā ca gāmino;* Ee *na chandā dosā na bhayā ca gāmino;* Ce Ke Se *na chanda,dosā na bhayā ca gāmino.*